



Committee On Finance

Max Baucus, Ranking Member

NEWS RELEASE

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Statement of U.S. Senator Max Baucus Senator Confirms Belief that Cuba Travel Ban Will be Suspended

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) U.S. Senator Max Baucus made the following statement today highlighting his belief that success can be achieved on suspending enforcement of the Cuba travel ban. Last week, the Senate voted 59-36 to eliminate funding that goes toward the enforcement of the Cuba travel ban and last month the House voted 227-188. The provision is included in the fiscal year 2004 Treasury-Transportation Appropriations Bill, which will next head to a joint House-Senate conference committee.

"I rise today to address an issue of great concern to me - the ban on travel to Cuba.

Last week, the Senate scored an important victory in the fight to bring common sense to U.S. policy towards Cuba. We voted by a wide margin - 59 to 36 - to suspend enforcement of the travel ban. The House approved the same amendment in September, also by a wide margin.

The wide margin of victory reflects the majority of Americans who want an end to the travel ban. Over the weekend, editorial writers from a diverse range of newspapers noted and applauded our victory. The Wall Street Journal. The New York Times. The Chicago Tribune. The Orlando Sentinel-Tribune.

Let me offer just a few quotes:

The Chicago Tribune says: "In an age of very real terrorist threats, Cuba hardly makes the list. For the Department of Homeland Security to redouble its efforts and tie up more money and personnel in enforcing the travel ban against Cuba - as the president proposed two weeks ago - is an incredible waste of resources."

The New York Times points out: "The proper response to such outrages as the Castro regime's roundup of dissidents and writers earlier this year is to seek to overwhelm the island with American influence."

The Orlando Sentinel argues: "The ban on U.S. travel is futile, self-defeating, a waste of scarce resources and inconsistent with other American policies."

I ask unanimous consent that copies of these editorials be entered into the record.

These papers spoke out in favor of the Senate's actions, because they recognize that the current policy has been a failure. And because they know that engagement with Cuba is the best and most effective way to bring democratic change to Cuba.

Mr. President, in my view, the Cuba travel provisions should not even be subject to conference. The House and Senate have passed the same amendment - there is nothing for conferees to discuss.

There are many Members of this body who have worked hard to ease the embargo. Any Treasury-Transportation conference report that does not include the Senate- and House-passed language is unacceptable, and we will look at all procedural options to stop this from happening.

That said, I fully expect this amendment to become law. Despite recent incorrect reporting, none of the supporters of this legislation believe that we can't accomplish our goal of lifting the Cuba travel ban.

And I have to say here - I do not believe that the President will veto this bill. Of course, the Cuba provisions have overwhelming support, but the appropriations bill itself passed the Senate 90 to 3. The Administration knows a veto could be easily overridden.

I do believe that pro-embargo forces see the writing on the wall. Momentum to end the embargo is clearly building. We have had a year filled with success.

Several months ago, Senators Enzi, Dorgan, and I introduced legislation - S.950 - that would permanently lift the travel ban. There are 31 co-sponsors of that legislation, and we are adding new co-sponsors this week. The Foreign Relations Committee has committed to vote on that legislation by the end of the year, and I expect the committee to approve it by a large majority.

Recent polls indicate that most Americans oppose the travel ban. In fact, even most Cuban Americans - historically supportive of the embargo - favor lifting the ban.

So the Senate and the House votes are only the latest rebuke of an outdated policy.

Mr. President, 13 of the 16 Senate appropriators on the Subcommittee were supportive of the Cuba amendment. And I am confident they will work hard to keep this provision. But I also know they will be under some pressure. I urge them to stand up to those who might try to defy the will of the Congress."

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